

Edward E. Ayer House  
2 East Banks Street  
(northeast corner of East  
Banks and North State Streets)  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1035

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
37-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
801 - 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1035

## EDWARD E. AYER HOUSE

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ILL,

16-CHIG,

37-

Location: 2 East Banks Street, northeast corner of East Banks and North State Streets, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Scotty Goodrich, LaSalle Glass and Mirror Company, 144 W. Superior Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Present Use: Small Apartments.

Statement of Significance: The house was designed in 1885 by Burnham and Root for Edward Everett Ayer, a wealthy Chicago supplier of railroad ties and collector of Indian lore. The medieval character of the house is typical of the work of Burnham and Root during the 1880's.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: Lot 6 and the south 15' of lot 5 in County Clerk's Division of lots 3 and 4 of Astor's Addition to Chicago, being a subdivision of part of the northwest fractional 1/4 section 3-39-14, recorded May 23, 1884.

The following is based on the chain of title contained in Book 422, pp. 15-17, in the Cook County Recorder's Office: On December 18, 1885, the first entry in the book records a party wall agreement between Emma A. Ayer, et al and Joel D. Harvey, et al for a wall between the south 10' and north 15' of lot 5 (Document 681165). [Note: The present building does not have a party wall at this location.] From that point to the present, the chain of title is unclear. On February 6, 1900, the property was sold to Henry L. Gloss (Document 2924415), however, at that time Ayer still apparently occupied the house. The last entry in the book, on January 29, 1963, indicates that Hallub Heating granted a lease to Mrs. M. T. Thomas (Document 18731654). A check with the LaSalle Glass and Mirror Company revealed that they are the present owners of the property.

[Note: In an interview with one of the occupants of the house, it was stated that the house has been scheduled for demolition in approximately two years. It is anticipated that a high-rise apartment building will eventually be constructed on the site.]

2. Date of erection: 1885. /Harriet Monroe, John Wellborn Root (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Company, 1896)./
3. Architects: Burnham and Root.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: There is no record of the original Building Permit. Below are two early descriptions of the house:

"Ayer, Edward E. Residence, Chicago," The Graphic (January 8, 1887), p. 22.

#### THE AYER'S MANSION

"Edward E. Ayer's residence, corner Bank and State Streets, Chicago, designed by Burnham and Root, architects, is about completed. When finished, this will certainly be one of Chicago's handsomest residences. The foundation is of blue limestone, the cappings of Bedford stone. Wisconsin granite being used for the exterior walls. The roof is of red Akron tile, Gothic art. The gutter conductors are cold rolled copper. The interior is finished throughout with hard wood.

"The system of heating this building is something that deserves mention. It is furnished with Johnson heat regulating service, which is an apparatus to automatically control artificial heat, so as to give uniform temperatures, and thereby increase the comfort and good health of those who use it, and decrease the care incidental to such apparatus. In each room is placed a thermostat which, to all appearances, is a handsome thermometer. The thermostat proper being placed directly behind the latter. By means of a screw, the former is set at any desirable temperature, and will not vary one degree. It can be used where steam, water, or hot air is the source of heat. This undoubtedly is one of the most desirable systems of regulating heat we have ever seen. It should also be stated that it is a great economizer of fuel; and was furnished by the National Electrical Co. of Chicago.

"Among the improvements of this residence which deserve more than a passing notice, is the system of call-bells and burglar-alarms. The former are placed in all the rooms, and an enunciator in kitchen, also speaking tubes throughout. It always is a pleasure to be able, in our sketches, to chronicle the triumph and success of industrial manufactures. Such is the case of the system of burglar alarms furnished Mr.

Ayer's residence by the Western Electric Company of this city. Of all modern inventions for the protection of residences, dwellings, etc. against the invasion of burglars, we have seen none that is so satisfactory as this one. It consists of a needle enunciator, which is placed in a sleeping-room. If the door or any window is moved the slightest bit, this will at once ring an alarm in the sleeping-room and the enunciator will indicate which window or door is being opened, and at the same time light the gas. This system is better than bull dogs, night watchman and pistols. The merits of this alarm cannot be too highly appreciated."

Francis Cummins Lockwood, The Life of Edward E. Ayer (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1929), pp. 276-279.

"There is no little sentiment connected with the building of Mr. Ayer's city house. He had the granite boulders gathered from the fields and waysides where he had roamed in his boyhood (Harvard, Illinois) and built into a somewhat stately edifice at the corner of State and Banks streets. The same sentiment and originality are revealed in the interior of this house, particularly in Mr. Ayer's special library in which the woodwork is all of Redwood lumber from California, the state in which he began his army career. It is to be noticed, too, that in this library room the mantelpieces are built of fragments of red petrified wood, secured in Arizona, not far from the Santa Fe railroad for which he had furnished the ties. In his travels in Mexico Mr. Ayer had selected slabs of Mexican Onyx of clouded green and white effects and of clouded milk-white which were used in the drawing-room and dining-room mantels.

"...The 'Fessor' [Professor David Swing], as Edward Ayer called him, often came for an intimate Sunday supper with him downstairs in the collectors favorite resort, 'the Indian Room.' This room was not a 'den,' though many a lion came there to chat, and relax, with Mr. Ayer. It was called 'the Indian Room' because it was richly adorned with Indian blankets, and on the floor besides Indian blankets, there were long rugs from the tents of Arab sheiks; also unusual Indian baskets and pottery with mystic designs--all these articles at a later time were donated to the Field Museum.

"In this 'Indian Room downstairs,' always so called, which had been the original repository of the volumes that went to make up the 'Ayer Collection' in the

Newberry Library, Edward Ayer used to love to sit of an evening with his wife near him, while he poured over the catalogues from foreign book sellers, who offered rare volumes for sale... More and more he loved this quiet, restful room especially on a winter night, when logs cut from the Lake Geneva woodlands burned cheerfully in the fireplace under the mantel-piece set with slabs of petrified wood, reminders of his adventurous exploits in Arizona.

"The 'Indian Room' was located on the basement floor in the circular portion below the southwest tower. An oil painting in the Ayer Room of the Newberry Library in Chicago, painted by Elbridge Ayer Burbank, a nephew, in 1897, depicts E. E. Ayer seated in the room surrounded by his Indian artifacts. The room contained a circular bookcase built into the wall, and was lighted by the small basement window to the south."

The interior ornament of the house contains much of the intertwined linear designs, characteristic of Root. In addition, the north stairwell wall is decorated with two murals, one above the other, which are thought to be later additions. (Information supplied by Robert Coale, cataloguer at the Newberry Library.) The murals are darkened with age, but are still quite visible. In the area extending from the first to the second floor, a mythological subject is depicted which contains figures, horses, chariot and landscape, all on a gold ground. Between the third and fourth floors an oriental (Indian) motif, containing figures, peacocks, temple, and landscape, is similarly painted on a gold ground. The artist is unknown.

5. Alterations and additions: The carriage house to the east has been converted into an apartment building; the interior has been divided to provide numerous small apartments. In 1943, the building suffered a 5% loss because of fire and was repaired (Building Permit 133509, dated February 26, 1943).

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

From a small plaque in the entrance of the house:

No. 2 Banks Street

Built in 1885

Burnham & Root, architects

Contrary to popular legend, the house was not built for Marshall Field (whose mansion was in fact in the southern half of the city on Prairie Avenue which was Chicago's first "gold coast"),

but for E. E. Ayer, a wealthy lumber dealer turned scholar, who was one of the first serious students of American Indian culture, and who donated much of the collection of Indian artifacts in the Field Museum.

In addition to the house he did for Ayer, John Root designed the Ayer monument in Harvard, Illinois /Monroe, op. cit./.

Below is a biographical sketch of E. E. Ayer:

"Edward E. Ayer, Chicago business man, benefactor of the world of arts, anthropology and science, was born at Kenosha, Wisconsin, November 16, 1841. His father descended from the old New England family of Ayer, went to what is now Kenosha in 1836, and in 1856 acquired land in McHenry County, Illinois, and laid out and founded the town of Harvard.

"Edward E. Ayer in 1860 crossed the plains to the mining districts of Nevada, and to San Francisco, and in the summer of 1861 enlisted in the northern army in California, being the first man sworn in on the Pacific Coast as a member of Company E. First California Calavary (sic). He was in campaigns in the Southwest, among the Navajo Indians of California, and other tribes, and was finally promoted to second lieutenant of the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry. He resigned his commission at Fort Craig, New Mexico, in May, 1864. On returning north he became a partner in his father's store at Harvard, but soon engaged in contracting, particularly in the supplying of ties and other timber to railroads. This developed into the chief business of his active career. He became widely known as a railroad contractor and in 1894 joined in the founding of the notable business known as the Ayer & Lord Tie Company of Chicago, probably the largest concern of its kind in the country. In 1900 he retired from active responsibilities though he remained a director in the Ayer & Lord Tie Company.

"Mr. Ayer's early experience with the wild Indians of the West developed a study and interest in the American Aborigines. About 1880 he began the systematic collection of articles characteristic of the arts of the wild tribes. The Ayer collection has long been one of the most notable features of the exhibits in the Field Museum of Chicago. He also gathered probably the most extensive library of works on the American Indian, which he donated to the Newberry Library. Mr. Ayer served as president of the Field Columbian Museum from 1893 to 1898, and after that as one of its directors of the Newberry Library, of the Chicago Art Institute, a life member of the American Historical Association. He married September 5, 1865, Miss Emma Burbank."

Edward Fitzsimmons Dunne, Illinois, The Heart of the Nation (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1933), Volume V, p. 40.

C. Sources of Information:

"Ayer, Edward E. Residence, Chicago," The Graphic (January 8, 1887). pp. 20, 22.

Drawing of house, description. Chicago Historical Society Library.

"Ayer, Edward Everett Obituary (1841 - May 3, 1927)," Chicago Tribune (May 4, 1927). p. 36.

Ayer, Edward Everett. Reminiscences and Travels.

Typescript in the Chicago Historical Society Library.

"Ayer on Indian Commission, Chicagoan appointed member of Board by President, Long Friend of Red Man, presented \$1,000,000 collection of relics to Field Museum." Chicago Tribune (November 21, 1912).

Dunne, Edward Fitzsimmons. Illinois, The Heart of the Nation. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1933. Volume V, p. 40.

Biographical sketch of Edward Everett Ayer.

Gilbert, Paul and Bryson, Charles Lee. Chicago and its Makers.

Chicago: Felix Mendelsohn, Publisher, 1929. p. 784.

Biographical sketch and portrait.

Lockwood, Francis Cummins. The Life of Edward E. Ayer.

Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1929. pp. 276-279.

Old view p. 278--ext. of tower. A biography.

Monroe, Harriet. John Wellborn Root. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1896. p. 37.

Engraving of entrance to house of E. E. Ayer.

Wilhelm, Donald, "Lumberman Bibliophile," Photostat reproduction of an article published in The October (August 25, 1915).

Chicago Historical Society Library. Biographical article.

D. Supplementary Material:

See HABS report on the DeKoven House, also by Burnham and Root, for a bibliography on John Root.

Prepared by J. William Rudd  
Supervisory Architect  
National Park Service  
and  
Larry J. Homolka  
Historian  
National Park Service  
July 1964

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house was done for a wealthy Chicago lumberman by the firm of Burnham and Root. The massive medieval character of the house is quite typical of much of the work of Burnham and Root in the late 1880's.
2. Condition of fabric: Some rooms in the house have been subdivided, but in general the house is in good condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two-and-a-half stories, on raised basement, approximately 80' (south front) by 40'; rectangular with a round tower at the southwest corner.
2. Foundations: Stone masonry with plastered walls in basement.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The exterior walls are dark gray, random, split-face granite. Lintels, arches, sills and belt-courses are light gray limestone.
4. Porches: There is an entrance porch under a large stone arch in the center of the south front.
5. Chimneys: One chimney with three flues serves the southwest rooms. One chimney with three flues serves entrance foyer and rooms above in the center of the house on the south. One chimney serves the dining room and rooms above on the east. One chimney serves the hall fireplace. This fireplace is located on the inside wall of the staircase and the flue carries under the stair landing to the chimney on the outside wall.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: There is a large (4'-0" x 8'-6" x 2- $\frac{1}{2}$ ") mahogany paneled door between the porch and the vestibule.



The original basement service entrance is in the short link connecting the main house and coach house.

- b. Windows: Windows in the south bay of the dining room have decorative leaded glass designs. There are casement windows on the top floor of the southwest tower. The rest of the windows have wooden, double-hung sash.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The house has a modified hipped roof. The southwest tower is topped by a pointed dome. There is an octagonal dome above the projecting bay which contains the reception foyer. The roof surfaces are tiled.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a heavy stone cornice at the top of the second floor.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There is a circular tower at the southwest corner of the house and a four-sided projecting bay to the east of the main entrance on the front facade. There is a gable at the third floor level directly above the main entrance arch. There is a small dormer with Jerkin-head roof on the west side of the roof.

C. Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement is subdivided into many rooms. It originally had a kitchen at the east end. The space is still used for this purpose. The remaining space is used for room rental purposes.
- b. First floor: Now two apartments, it was originally composed of an entrance foyer, opening into a large reception stair hall. East of this space was the original dining room with south window bay and a large fireplace on the east flanked by built-in book cases. A very large mirror is located over the fireplace. To the west of the reception hall was the original drawing room with a rounded bay in southwest corner which appears as a tower on the exterior.
- c. Second floor: Originally bedrooms and bath rooms, it is now used as individual rentals. The bathroom adjacent to the bedroom over the reception foyer on the south side of house contains its original fixtures.

- d. Third floor: Original bedrooms and bathrooms, it is now used as individual rentals. The tower on the southwest of the building at this level has very generous casement windows and the floor is raised four steps above that of the adjacent room.
2. Stairways: The main stair on the north central wall of the house is made up of two quarter-circles with a straight landing between them and runs from first to third floor. Murals cover the entire north wall of the stairwell in two separate scenes - one between floors one and two, the second between floors two and three. This stair also carries to the basement, but is much narrower. A separate servant stair is in an adjacent well to the east of the main stair.
3. Flooring: Flooring is oak strips laid end to end, in some cases in a diagonal pattern. In most major rooms there is a narrow dark strip of inlaid wood which follows the wall lines about 12" from the wall. Original bathrooms had white ceramic tile floors, but most are now covered with asphalt tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: There is a wooden beam and deck ceiling in the reception hall. In the original dining room, the wooden beam ceiling is decorated with a plaster shell motif. Walls and ceilings in the rest of the house are plaster.
5. Doorways and doors. Most original doors and frames still exist. On the first floor they are oak. On the second and third floors they are bird's-eye maple.
6. Decorative features and trim: On the second and third floor trim is of bird's-eye maple and has delicately detailed upper corners with 5" radii. On the first floor, trim is oak. In the original living room the trim is approximately 10" wide and has a similar radius at each upper corner. There is also a delicate carving at each corner with each pair being different.
7. Hardware: Original brass hardware still exists in the house.
8. Lighting: A number of original light fixtures remain in the reception foyer, dining room and reception hall.
9. Heating: The house has central heat with a fireplace in each major room as well.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south on Banks Street and is located in the original "Gold Coast" area of Chicago. Many older homes still exist in the area, but there is a trend toward high-rise apartments. A coach house is located to the east of the main building and is attached to it.
2. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: There is a small strip of grass between the walk and house on the south and some lawn to the west. A wrought-iron fence encloses the service entrance between the coach house and main house.

Prepared by J. William Rudd  
Supervisory Architect  
National Park Service  
July 1964

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The records of this structure were made during the 1964 Chicago II Project. This was the second in a series of summer projects designed to record the significant architecture of the Chicago area. The project was sponsored by Mr. Earl A. Reed, FAIA. He was assisted by a Finance Committee composed of John Furgard, FAIA; William E. Hartmann, FAIA; Alfred Shaw, FAIA; and a Selection committee consisting of James Arkin, AIA; Ruth Schoneman, Art Institute of Chicago; and J. Carson Webster, Northwestern University. Organizations cooperating with HABS in this project were the City of Chicago; the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, its Foundation, the Garrick Salvage Fund; and the Women's Architectural League of Chicago. The City of Chicago provided office space, and the Illinois Institute of Technology furnished living quarters.

Mr. James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, was in over-all charge of HABS summer programs. Professor J. William Rudd, then of Texas Technological College, served as Chicago II Project Supervisor. Other members of the summer team were historian, Larry Homolka, Harvard University; photographer, Harold Allen; secretary, Mrs. Bert P. Schloss; and student architects, Joseph Hayman, University of Pennsylvania; Robert Felin, University of Pennsylvania; Robert Saxon, Pennsylvania State University; Rex Poggenpohl, Illinois Institute of Technology; and Janis Erins, Illinois Institute of Technology.